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EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000033

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/12

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SUBJECT: VENEZUELA MAKES ADDITIONAL CLAIMS OVER ALLEGED AIRSPACE VIOLATION

REF: 10CARACAS3; 10CARACAS29

CLASSIFIED BY: DUDDY, AMBASSADOR, DOS, AMB; REASON: 1.4(A), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a nationally televised briefing the evening of January 11, Venezuelan Vice President and Defense Minister Ramon CarrizC!lez, flanked by two generals, provided different information about the alleged January 8 U.S. incursion into Venezuelan airspace than that provided just hours earlier by Foreign Minister Maduro to Charge Caulfield (ref b). During Carrizalez' briefing, General Colina identified Venezuela's Flight Information Region (FIR) as sovereign airspace. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During a nationally televised press briefing the evening of January 11, Venezuelan Vice President and Defense Minister Ramon CarrizC!lez, flanked by Air Force General Alexis Colina and Army General Carlos Mata Figueroa, claimed to have "conclusive evidence" in support of President Chavez' January 8 claim of a U.S. military aircraft violating Venezuelan airspace from Curacao. Noting the denial by Ambassador of The Netherlands of any airspace violation, Carrizalez asserted that "we confirm and demonstrate to the country and the world that incursions of our airspace are occurring to provoke and to test our reaction and at any moment to implement an aggression. For this reason, we denounce, with proof in hand as we have been doing, the incursions of warplanes dispatched from the island of Curacao."

¶3. (SBU) In the briefing, CarrizC!lez specifically claimed a U.S. military aircraft violated Venezuelan airspace twice on January 8 while an "AWACS" or USAF E-3 SENTRY was airborne, thus proving it was not a navigational error because of the AWACS' superior electronics and its mission of "directing" other aircraft. Carrizalez also claimed that another U.S. warplane with the same transponder code as the January 8 aircraft had requested permission to enter Venezuelan airspace on January 11 but had been denied entry by Venezuelan air traffic controllers. He also alleged that there had been "at least 14 illegal entries into sovereign Venezuelan airspace, but because of the lack of radar systems in the past, they could not document them."

¶4. (SBU) General Colina showed a navigational chart depicting the supposed air track of the alleged January 8 airspace violation. Colina said the U.S. military aircraft "entered our

Flight Information Region (FIR), that is to say our sovereign airspace control, by three or four miles" then withdrew. The general claimed that the Venezuelan air traffic controller contacted the Curacao Control Tower to inquire about the aircraft's identify, but the response was ambiguous, at one point suggesting that the plane might be a U.S. Coast Guard aircraft. Two Venezuelan F-16 fighters were then mobilized from Barquisimeto as the aircraft made a second incursion of the FIR, flying three to four miles inside their sovereign airspace but parallel to the FIR boundary. The F-16s "intercepted" the aircraft and forced it to depart Venezuelan airspace. Colina added that the two F-16s conducted a combat air patrol off the coast of Venezuela to defend the national sovereignty in case of a third intrusion.

¶15. (C) Carrizalez' briefing differed in several respects from the information provided earlier in the day by Foreign Minister Maduro to the Charge during their meeting and via diplomatic note. Specifically, neither Maduro nor the diplomatic note made any reference to the presence of AWACS. Second, the route traced by Colina was not the "direct Curacao-Maiquetia route" described in the diplomatic note. Lastly, the diplomatic note alleged that communications had taken place between the aircraft and the Venezuelan air traffic control, while Carrizalez only claimed that conversations were held between the Venezuelan and Curacao air traffic control towers.

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¶16. (C) Comment. Carrizalez again appeared as the Venezuelan government's point person on this issue of U.S. violations of Venezuelan airspace. On January 5, he claimed to have evidence that the United States and The Netherlands were planning a military operation against Venezuela from Curacao (ref a). In recent rumors regarding a possible Cabinet shuffle, Carrizalez' position as Vice President has been mentioned as being vulnerable. Carrizalez and Colina are using the FIR and sovereign airspace as interchangeable concepts to support their claims of U.S. "aggression." A complete Flash video of the press conference is available at [http://www.vtv.gob.ve/noticias-nacionales/283\\_98](http://www.vtv.gob.ve/noticias-nacionales/283_98).

CAULFIELD